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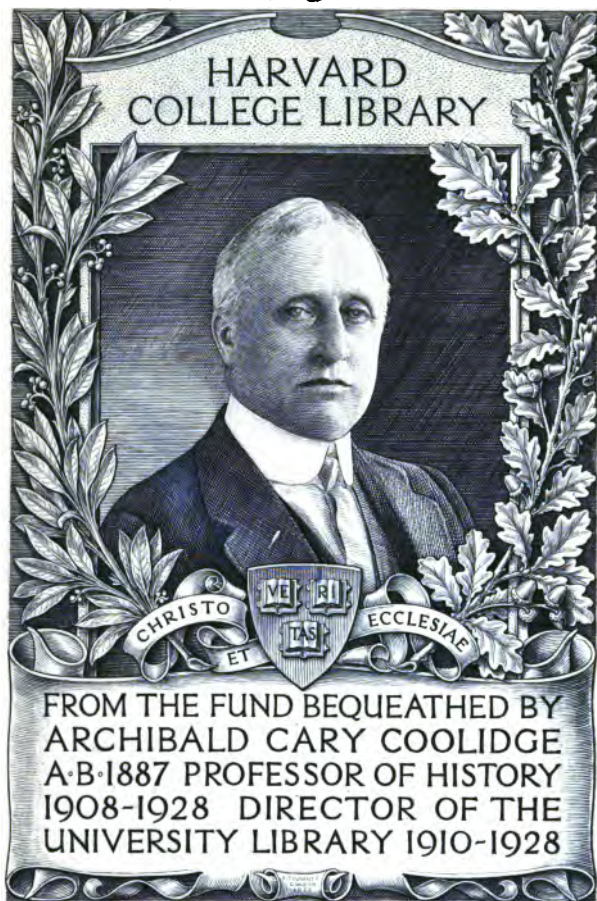
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° ENGLAND'S POLICY AND PERIL:

A LETTER

TO THE

EARL OF BEACONSFIELD.

BY ALFRED AUSTIN.

LONDON:

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# ENGLAND'S POLICY AND PERIL:

A LETTER TO THE EARL OF BEACONSFIELD.

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MY LORD,

The fortunes of the British Empire are trembling in the balance, and it is your hand that can adjust the scales. Do I need any other excuse for addressing you? If I did, I should perhaps find it in the recollection that, little more than a twelvemonth ago, and at a moment almost equally critical, I was allowed, without rebuke from my countrymen, to address words of deferential remonstrance to one hardly less distinguished than yourself. The motive that impels me is the strongest that can influence a human being. It is love of country; and I trust that, not in your eyes only, but in the estimation of others less likely to be indulgent, it will suffice to acquit me of the offence of presumption.

You stand at the parting of the ways, and you cannot halt there long. You will have to decide, and decide quickly, whether you shall summon your countrymen to a full comprehension of the dangers that threaten them, or trust to their want of patriotism to keep you in power after you have ceased to deserve it. Your vision is too clear, and the scope of your political intelligence too wide, for it to be possible that you yourself should in this matter err for lack of knowledge or from deficiency of penetration. It was you who declared on a memorable occasion that England is an Asiatic Power; and though the scurrilous and the shallow fancied the dictum was a fit theme for feeble wit, the wise knew you had struck a true note, which

has ever since been vibrating in the understandings of your countrymen.

Yes, England is an Asiatic Power, and momentous occurrences are at this hour passing in Asia. Passing, did I say? I pray Heaven they be not already passed! Kars has fallen, Erzeroum is threatened, and may possibly have succumbed even before these lines meet your eye. Batoum and Trebizond will in turn be menaced, and Armenia is already designated at Moscow and St. Petersburg as a Russian province. I do not pause to inquire whether Kars fell the victim to a night attack, or to something darker than night. Treasons, stratagems, and toils have marked the course of the aggressors from the day when they paid the Bulgarians to revolt against their Sovereign to this hour when they would bribe Mohammedans to betray him, and the motions of Muscovite generals may well be, like those of Muscovite diplomatists, as dark as Erebus. No investigations can increase our knowledge of Russia's perfidy, and it is not with its chicane, but with its conquests, that we have now to deal. Save for snow, that will infallibly melt, its legions are virtually masters of Armenia, and the whole of Asia Minor feels the reverberation of their triumph.

What will you do? Believe me, my Lord, all Englishmen who rise above the passions of party are looking to you for an answer. You are greatly trusted. It is against you that the poisoned arrows of enraged philanthropists are mainly directed, and the confidence felt in you by honest men is in proportion to the obloquy of these disingenuous malignants. From the leafless woods of Hawarden there comes a note of challenge; and no one can mistake its significance. Listen! "Until the great issue still proceeding is

undecided, I, for one, if my life is spared, shall persevere. . . . The Prime Minister says he remains in conditional neutrality. We therefore remain in conditional quietude. . . . If the Government desists from neutrality, we, too, shall desist from neutrality, and shall take care not to be responsible for national disgrace and crime. We shall show fight like Englishmen. The nation shall decide." If these words had proceeded from a less august source, I should have been disposed to compress them into smaller compass, and to say their real meaning is, "If the Government attempts to save the Empire, we will take good care to destroy the Government." But seventy years of life, and nearly fifty of public service, seem to stand between Mr. Gladstone and the ordinary justice of controversy. When the missionaries of Rome, after having converted the Saxons of Northumbria to Christianity, urged them to hurl down the idol they had hitherto adored, no one had for a time the courage to lay hands upon an image rendered sacred by long faith and veneration. Amid the general hesitation, a priest stepped forth and with one rude stroke of the axe shattered the god with whose hollowness and futility he was, better than laymen, acquainted. I have never been a hierophant of the Radical persuasion, so I must leave it, shall I say? to a certain notorious daily paper to desecrate the god it once suffocated with incense. For the talents of Mr. Gladstone I share the universal admiration, and I, at least, must be permitted still to respect his character. But there never was a time when his views on foreign policy, if indeed desultory impulses deserve the name of policy, were not startlingly unequal to his great reputation and omnivorous activity. He has confessed that he never considered the case of Poland. Yet he was a member

of the Cabinet that took up the wrongs of Poland in 1863, and wrote despatches of even insulting vehemence to the Court of St. Petersburg. I do not know that it will mend Mr. Gladstone's position if I add that the Cabinet of which he was a member, after inciting the unhappy Poles to revolt, abandoned them to their fate. But his responsibility for what then occurred, coupled with his disclaimer of ever having considered the case of Poland, confirms the common suspicion that his treatment of questions of foreign policy springs from accident and impulse, not from coherent foresight or consistent deliberation.

But, my Lord, Mr. Gladstone's infirmity in this particular will not help you. His motives in throwing down the challenge I have quoted may be the purest, as his understanding in regard to Foreign Policy may be the most perverse. But Mr. Gladstone is still a great power in England; for he can rally to any banner he thinks fit to flaunt, most of the fools and all the fanatics in the kingdom. Abetted by that more perfidious portion of your opponents who are neither fanatics nor fools, they constitute a force it would be levity to underrate. His challenge is substantially the challenge of the Liberal Party; and that challenge is, "Attempt to save your country, and we will do our best to ruin your Cabinet."

You will not suppose that I am imputing to you any dereliction of duty. I have said you are greatly trusted; and my trust in you is complete. But you must speak out. The time for reserve has passed away; the period of generalities is closed. The world has heard certain excellent abstract propositions, and now awaits their application. The nation is growing bewildered; and from bewilderment to despondency

is often but a step. Ceasing to understand, they will begin to disbelieve in you; and, unable to discern your policy, they will slowly conclude that you have none. Vigilant adversaries are watching to foment their fears, and are availing themselves of your silence to misconstrue your conduct in the past and misrepresent your attitude in the present. Themselves your implacable foes, they are striving to disseminate distrust in the breasts of your followers; and there is a danger lest the more patriotic of your countrymen should abandon you, through misconceiving that you have abandoned your country. I implore you to step forth, and place things in their true light. So long as it seemed possible that Turkish valour might foil Muscovite fraud, there was much excuse for reserve and procrastination; and no member of your party harassed you with questions or importuned you for a programme. But they were silent because they felt sure you had one. The time has come to say what it is.

I recur to your pregnant assertion that England is an Asiatic Power; for that, as far as England and Englishmen are concerned, is the pith of the Eastern Question. It was all very well, before treaties were violated, to appeal to the integrity and independence of the Ottoman Empire; and you had the approbation of every disinterested statesman when you refused to be an accessory before the fact to depriving the Sultan of his authority in Bulgaria. You acted as one who was acting, not for England only, but for European peace; and not for Europe only, but for public right. Of that duty you acquitted yourself with dignity and honour; and though Russia proceeded to an act of piracy, she received no letters of marque from this country. But we are no longer where we were: we are out of the

mud and ruts of the Conference. War, like marriage, abolishes many previous arrangements; and it is not for us any longer to waste consideration on foisted atrocities and fraudulent proposals of Autonomy. Though the gallantry of Osman Pasha may still fascinate our gaze to linger round the famished intrenchments of Plevna, it is not upon a village on the Vid, but on a fallen fortress near a more famous river, that the eyes of Englishmen should now be fixed. The valleys of the Danube are more crowded with troops; but the valley of the Euphrates is more full of danger. The lovers of sensation may be more absorbed by bloodshed promised in the Balkans; but the lovers of their country will turn with a more serious earnestness to the military menace that proceeds from the western spurs of the Caucasus. The course of pregnant political controversy is invariably clouded by a host of subsidiary issues; but it is the function of a great statesman, at the fitting moment, to concentrate the attention of his countrymen on the one point that concerns them, and to fasten their energy on its solution. Insisting once more that England is an Asiatic Power, you have to divert their barren curiosity from the mouths of the Danube and the passes of Mount Hæmus to territories with which they have immeasurably more concern. It is concentration of our senses and our resolves that at this moment can alone save us from the perils that beset us. It is widely and correctly believed that so much at least of the famous Triple Alliance subsists as to guarantee Germany and Austria against any modification of existing arrangements in Europe that would clash with their interests or arouse their displeasure. I am not one of those who think it is the business of Prince Bismarck to look after the



interests of the British Empire. In a long and interesting conversation I once had the honour to hold with that illustrious personage, I remember his saying, in his idiomatic way, "The shirt is nearer to the skin than the coat;" and though I do not suppose he would, from mere malice or ill-will, nourish any designs against the welfare of this country, he would certainly never pause to inquire if a course that clearly benefited Germany injured us. Why should he? Doubtless he considers that England is, or ought to be, strong enough to take care of itself; and his affectionate concern for the interests of Austria, whether real or feigned, must not be regarded as anything more than an extension of his sound and practical principle of enlightened self-interest.

You are the only man living to whom, after naming Prince Bismarck, one can turn, without seeming to collocate characters small and great. His career may seem to the vulgar to have been more dramatic and splendid than yours; for it has not fallen to your lot to defy a Parliament or to found an Empire. But the fertility of your mind and the fortitude of your will may fairly be matched with his. I do not think that, with your resources, he could have equalled your fortunes. I do not doubt that, with his chances, you would even have surpassed his fame. At present your difficulties are neither greater nor less than his. You have, like him, only to be resolutely patriotic in intention, and unswervingly direct in conduct, to convince him that if Russia is to be propitiated, it is not by the sacrifice of the interests of England. You have too keen a sense of the national dignity and the national honour to make an ignominious appeal to Prince Bismarck to do for us what we ought to do for ourselves

England's special and exclusive interests in European Turkey begin at Constantinople, the Bosphorus, and the Dardanelles; though the interests we have in common with Germany and Austria may stretch to the Danube. But have we any interests in common with those two Powers? It is for them to decide. If they imagine that, by encouraging Russia to make conquests in Asia Minor, they can divert her ambition from Bulgaria and bind her to engagements in Europe that shall leave their interests untouched, it is for England, it is for you, my Lord, to baffle a conspiracy which cannot be called criminal, since it is eminently patriotic. To rail at Prince Bismarck for a plan of policy that must necessarily commend itself to every German that understands it, or to inveigh against Count Andrassy for co-operating with Prince Bismarck in diverting Russia's schemes of aggrandisement from the frontiers of Austria to the continent of Asia, would be only to parade our impotence, or to show that we had just power enough left to indulge in an outburst of childish spleen.

What is here set forth is an open secret. If there be any one who does not understand the situation, it is not from want of information, but from lack of ordinary perception and ordinary intelligence. Some persons have attributed to Prince Bismarck the Machiavellian design of having half induced, half impelled Russia into war. The suspicion makes us no wiser; and we can well dispense with it. The vigilant desire of vengeance cherished by the French people, and the doubt whether Austria's oblivion of Sadowa is as sincere as it sometimes appears, compel Germany to do everything, within reason, not to forfeit Russia's friendship and goodwill. Hence Germany's signature to the

Berlin Memorandum; hence Germany's readiness to endorse the Andrassy Note; hence Germany's inability to hamper Russia's hands or contravene Russia's suggestions at the Conference. Germany's complaisance was imperatively imposed upon Prince Bismarck by the necessity of not alienating the Court of St. Petersburg. Thus, by adopting an obvious course, which needs no subtle interpretation, Germany, till the outbreak of the war, sheltered itself from harm. Germany could not have prevented hostilities without losing a friend; and now that its friend has engaged in a war of conquest, Prince Bismarck's wit<sup>•</sup> is occupied in taking care, firstly, that Germany be not dragged into the struggle, and secondly, that the war of conquest, if successful, shall not benefit the friend at the expense of the friend's benevolent neutral.

Forgive me, my Lord, for setting forth, thus briefly, what is far better known to you than to me. I should not be guilty of the presumption of publicly expounding facts and indicating policy to you, even were I conceited enough to imagine that I possess information to which you are denied access, or could suggest courses of practical wisdom to which you are insensible. It is, of course, not to you, but to those of my countrymen who stand bewildered by the multiplicity of issues of which they have heard, and are still hearing, that my last observations are addressed. They have been told so much of the Danube, of the Balkans, the Sulina mouth, the neutrality of the Euxine, the autonomy of Bulgaria, the independence and integrity of the Ottoman Empire, the joint interests of England and Hungary, the Hellenic factor, and a dozen other most interesting but to us now subordinate questions, that they may well be pardoned if their perplexity is complete, and if.

to use a colloquial phrase, they hardly know where they are.

*First* Surely it is for you, their chief and most trusted adviser, to tell them. It is for you to explain to them, with a perspicacity of diction to which I can lay no claim, and with an authority of which I am absolutely devoid, that what was the policy, and justly the policy, of England before war was declared, can no longer be the measure of England's policy now that the struggle has advanced several stages, and may possibly be approaching its termination. Russia invited this country to co-operate with her in hectoring Turkey, in order to entrap us into assailing it; and Mr. Gladstone and his confederates clamorously seconded the amazing suggestion. Obedient to the faith of treaties, to the dictates of policy, to the warnings of good sense, you firmly resisted foreign seducers and their domestic abettors; and the honour of England was saved. Your concern for good government in Turkey, though not so hysterical as that of your adversaries, was doubtless to the full as serious and as deep; and though justice to every one in Bulgaria must necessarily be as agreeable to you as to the most vehement philanthropist, you would not be duped by a plea of international benevolence into a partnership for the dismemberment of Turkey with the rapacious Power that dismembered Poland. All the miseries that have ever been depicted as incident to Hell have been inflicted on the unfortunate people the Czar undertook to liberate; and we can only hope that their children will receive some compensation for the worse than fiendish fate they have been made to endure. England at least need raise no objection to any arrangement that promises to secure their welfare; and as you stood

foremost to avert from them the horrors by which they have since been visited, you most fitly can proclaim that England will accept any settlement that will bring those horrors to a close. Your powerful voice could quickly explain to the English nation how it has devolved upon Germany and Austria to reconcile, in Bulgaria and Roumelia, their own interests and those of Turkey with the pretensions of Russia, and how the attention of England must be concentrated exclusively on that portion of the Eastern Question which concerns none but ourselves, and which Germany and Austria, by dexterously ignoring it, in effect tell Russia may be settled, unless England should choose single-handed to interfere, in any way Russia pleases.

Thus we stand face to face with our peril. Let us accuse no one, but confront it like a people clear of brain and resolute of purpose. I spoke of a conspiracy that is not criminal. But its existence is patent. Russia is to be bought off from Europe with the bribe of being allowed to compensate herself in Asia. Germany and Austria are to suffer no hurt, because injury to England will serve Russia's purpose equally well and feed Russia's grudges infinitely better. Possibly the satisfaction felt by Russia at the prospect of territorial acquisitions in Asia Minor would be so complete that she might be willing to accept arrangements in Europe less pleasing to herself than to her European confederates. The union of Bulgaria and Roumania under one sceptre, and that sceptre held by a Hohenzollern, would run counter to the traditions of St. Petersburg. But it would scarcely fail to inspire pleasure at Berlin and might allay trepidation at Vienna; and some sacrifice might well be made for the splendid prizes of Kars, Batoum, and Trebizond, and for the intense gratification

sending through India a shock of surprise, and through England a shudder of alarm and a tingle of shame.

But you, my Lord, are too clear-seeing a statesman not to perceive that it is undesirable at this moment to speculate overmuch as to the probable rewards to be reaped by Germany and Austria for leaving Russia liberty of action against ourselves. Just as we should be too proud and too sensible to indulge in recriminations against the friends of our foe, so we should be too practical to concern ourselves with the bribes that may have secured their friendship. Not what they gain, but what we may lose, constitutes our peril, and must shape our policy.

But shall we consent to be losers? Will England submit to be the dupe and victim of this adroit bargain? If she is to submit, it must be either because you are not Prince Bismarck's match in statecraft, or England is not Germany's match in power. Englishmen will more easily believe the first than the second. I believe neither. But my faith is founded on the fact that Englishmen have not yet understood the danger, and that you have not yet called on them to avert it. Their eyes are rapidly being opened, and your lips will shortly have to be unlocked. We know our peril. Let us know your policy.

Will you not, then, come forth, and take the Nation into your confidence? If you have gone over to the ranks of those who opine that honour is sounding brass, and self-interest but a tinkling cymbal; if you share the conclusions of those sophistical optimists who affect to believe that the British Empire is the one exception to the laws of nature and the lessons of History, and that it is so supremely strong it can afford to tolerate any aggression against its outposts, and any and every



slur upon its credit ; come forth equally, I would say, and make your new confession to an amazed but tolerant people. Tell them that England is not an Asiatic Power, but an insignificant island in a northern sea, cut off comfortably from the controversies of mankind by a silver streak. Tell them that the Crimean War was a wanton waste of blood and treasure ; that Balaklava was a delusion and Inker-~~man~~a snare ; and comfort the parents who yet proudly cherish the memory of their slaughtered sons, and the widows who yet bewail the loss of their sacrificed husbands, by explaining to them that these bled and perished in defence of a gigantic blunder. Tell them that our interests are as remote from the Euxine as from the Arctic Sea ; that the heroic defence of Kars in 1855 by Englishmen, who were then deemed to have made themselves immortal, arose from sheer geographical ignorance ; and that if they will only get maps of sufficient magnitude, they will not fail to discover that Asia Minor is almost as far off from us as the Mountains of the Moon, and about of equal importance.

But it is to insult you to assume, even for an instant, that you have abjured the principles of a lifetime on the first occasion on which you found yourself called upon to apply them. I have little doubt what must be the tenor of your discourse, if you consent to give your countrymen the benefit of your political meditations. You will tell them that, advancing philanthropy as a pretext, Russia embarked upon a war of aggrandisement ; that, finding the road to increase of territory in the European Continent blocked by the veto of Germany and the armies of Austria, she aspires to reap the reward of her enterprise in those Asiatic Provinces which Prince

Bismarck can contemplate with stoic indifference, and Count Andrassy consider with a sigh of relief; and that, having adjusted their interests to their own satisfaction, two out of the allied Emperors have left it to England to baulk the third, of those compensations with which they have no concern. You will tell them that the end of war is peace, and the end of a successful war acquisition of territory; that, fight as long and as intrepidly as they may, the Turks will finally succumb to the greater resources and preponderant numbers of their assailant; that, having Turkey at her mercy, Russia will demand the cession of territory in Asiatic Turkey, which is denied her in European Turkey; that the transfer of Kars, Trebizond, Batoum, Erzeroum, in fact Armenia and a goodly slice of the southern coast of the Black Sea, to the Russian Crown, will be the ransom exacted from the Ottoman Empire for the cessation of hostilities; that, as Mr. Layard has pointed out, Persia will then irrevocably become the vassal of the Czar, the road to Syria will lie open to his arms, and that Affghanistan on the one hand, and Egypt on the other, will daily brood on the evidence of his daring, and the enhanced authority of his name.

Having told them thus much, you will scarcely be able to stop at the mere recital of the terms which Russia will certainly exact, and the Sublime Porte will, with equal certainty, be obliged to concede, if no third Power intervenes to hinder the bargain. You will, perforce, be driven to liberate your mind, and to tell them whether you are of opinion that the bargain is one which England can tolerate, or one which she must needs forbid. About the facts there can be no contest. "We have now taken Kars for a third time," says a Russian paper, the *Novoe Vremya*. "A thing that has

cost us such sacrifices cannot be given back. Henceforth Kars is a Russian town, a Russian fortress, and one of our firmest barriers in Asia Minor!" These words were written in the middle of November, or immediately on the receipt of the news of the fall of Kars. Does any one think the Russian people have grown more moderate in the interval? *L'appétit vient en mangeant*; and fresh successes will only have whetted their palate for domination.

No! the facts are beyond doubt. Heroic resistance will at length be exhausted, and Turkey will be asked to surrender the provinces, the fortresses, and the sea-ports I have named. She will have no option but to submit to the demand, unless some third Power counsels and assists her to refuse. There is no Power but England that will dream of proffering such counsel or rendering such assistance; since there is no Power but England to whom, at present at least, it matters one straw whether Armenia remains to the Sultan or is absorbed by the Czar.

What then, my Lord, would be the next step in the confidences addressed by you to your countrymen? We have been led by the pitiless logic of facts face to face with our true position. How would you avoid facing the question, in what attitude we are to confront it? Of two things, inevitably one. You must either tell them that we are going to be jockeyed, and that the best thing we can do is to put up with a subtle combination of insult and injury, or you must call upon them to support you in warning those who meditate inflicting upon us combined damage and affront, that the one will be resented, and the other averted, by the collected might of the British Empire.

Then I am urging you to summon your countrymen

to arms, and to plunge the nation into the hideous maelstrom of war? There will be those to say so; for candour is not the most conspicuous characteristic of contemporaneous philanthropists. One is pretty sure to be stigmatized as a passionate promoter of bloodshed, just as one has grown accustomed to be described as an ardent Turcophil; although, with all my moral scorn for Russia, I have never penned a line or breathed a word to justify any one in asserting there is aught I admire in the Turkish Government, or anything I revere in the Turks themselves, except patriotism, courage, and sobriety. We cannot expect the new school of political moralists to regard patriotism as a virtue; and one of its most noisy proselytes assures us that courage, far from meriting the application, is a sure sign of barbarism. But I confess I should have thought even its most superfine professors would have yielded one throb of compassion, if not of sympathy, for the assailed in this cruel struggle, when it was pointed out to them that a nation of water-drinkers is to be exterminated by the most drunken community in Europe.

Pray pardon me, my Lord, for this momentary digression. I doubt if there lives the man who, within the bounds of practical reason, abhors war more than I do. But the Old Testament is a forgery, and the New Testament is a fable, unless there be occasions upon which war becomes not only reconcilable with justice, but synonymous with duty. The great Christian poet of even the nineteenth century has said, without rebuke from his Christian admirers, that "Carnage is God's daughter." It is a hard saying; and I know not how to explain it. War seems to me more like a dispensation of Hell than a decree of Heaven; and the indivi-

dual conscience that feels this shock, even while submitting to the conditions it did not make and cannot avoid, can only humbly await the day "*quando in lumine Ipsius videbimus lumen.*"

Meanwhile we must act like men who do not shrink from the stern facts of life. If war ever ensues from the performance of duty, we cannot shirk the one in order to escape the other. But am I urging you to involve the nation in war? On my honour, I believe, it is only by telling the nation the truth, and by summoning it to do its duty, war will ultimately be averted. Russia has desisted from claiming any increase of territory in Europe, because she well understands that she could obtain it only by fighting the armies of Austria and thwarting the arrangements of Germany. Let it be once well understood that she will obtain accession of territory in Asia Minor only after confronting and exhausting the resources of the British Empire, and her lust of aggrandizement will quickly shrivel. She will no more demand from Turkey the cession of Armenia than she would demand from England the occupation of Kent. By a simple but categorical warning we shall exonerate ourselves from loss and discredit as cheaply as Prince Bismarck protects Germany from strife, and as safely as Count Andrassy safeguards Austria from molestation.

At the same time, I am well aware that you, my Lord, and your colleagues, would never condescend to indulge in a mere *brutum fulmen*. A member of the late Government said the other day that we ought to have threatened Turkey in concert with Russia, and, if we found the threat unavailing, have washed our hands of the business. I am not supposing that you would adopt this bark-without-biting strategy, or that you

would shape your policy after the example of the mongrels of the kennel. Your warning would doubtless be a menace; and your menace would be accompanied by those significant preparations that would prove you ready, if needs were, to enforce it. That force would have eventually to be employed, I again say, on my honour, I do not believe.

But what if it proved to be otherwise? Then, not with a light heart, but a heavy one, but at the same time with a clear conscience and a determined purpose, you would have to enforce by the sword what warnings and menace had been powerless to accomplish.

Let us then, with a candour without which controversy is the basest use of the faculties, acknowledge that, immensely improbable as it seems, admonitions and threats might possibly prove unavailing, and that there is just a bare chance your resolve to defend the interests intrusted to your care might embark the empire in war. A demand for a written pledge from Russia to evacuate Armenia on the conclusion of the war might possibly be refused, and you would then have to compel the evacuation of so much of it as had yet been conquered. We sometimes hear it is the duty of statesmanship to localise the war. The war would remain as much localised as ever. When I am told that, were we to strike for our interests in Asia Minor, we should find Germany actively employed on the side of Russia, I can only smile at the profound political ignorance that can make such a suggestion, and will not insult your understanding by discussing it. Prince Bismarck's epigrams invariably contain truth as well as wit; and he has publicly declared that the Eastern Question is not worth to Germany the bones of one Pomeranian soldier. Moreover, Alsace and Lor-



raine are hostages to peace, so long as France remains quiescent. Nothing but absolute compulsion would cause Austria to participate in the fray. The unity of Italy is perhaps the happiest accomplishment of our age; but it would not be worth three months' purchase, if her statesmen, the most practical in the world, were to adopt a policy actively thwarting the necessities of this country.

Let us, therefore, be rid of noxious nonsense, and, just as we admit the possible, dismiss the utterly impossible. The very worst that could happen would be that, having determined to protect our interests, we might be compelled to fight for them; and that a third combatant, ourselves, might have to step upon the scene, to prevent Russia, after defeating Turkey, from defrauding us.

And here I must allude to an objection with which I confess I am surprised to find myself confronted, but to which I feel bound to advert, lest it should be deemed I avoid it because I think it formidable. Only very inconsiderate persons suppose that Germany would interfere by arms on behalf of Russia, if we found ourselves compelled to stem the tide of Russian conquest in Armenia. But some who are willing to allow that the war would still be localised, and that there would then only be three main combatants instead of two, urge that England could not venture upon such an enterprise with a reasonable hope of success, single-handed, and without any ally boasting an imposing military force. Is the objection serious, and are the persons who make it really in earnest? If they are, they must, after witnessing the efforts of Russia during the last six months, have a very low estimate of the resources of the British Empire. It seems to me, and it will sure!

seem to many, that Russia, contending against Turkey and the British Empire, would be hopelessly over-matched. But if there be any who gravely think that the expulsion of the Russians from Armenia is a task too herculean for our capacity, then, instead of suggesting that, in order to recoup ourselves for Russia seizing Armenia, we should seize Egypt—a suggestion, I will parenthetically say, I could not regard as politic, since it might eventually embroil us with France, even if I could cease to regard it, save *in extremis*, and when no other alternative of safety was left, as base—they should copy the cynical pusillanimity of Mr. Lowe, and counsel us to make haste and save ourselves from discomfiture by abandoning India.

But resistance to Russia in Armenia would be to make us the allies of Turkey, and to place our soldiers, or at least our officers, side by side with the murderers of Batak and the ravishers of Bulgaria, and so to involve us in what Mr. Gladstone calls “national disgrace.” This particular argument was invented by his sensitive and mercurial mind; but as it seemed to be a capital instrument for party agitation, it has been widely employed by those who are at once the friends of humanity and the foes of England. Not even the fact that it commends itself to Mr. Gladstone must withhold me from observing that it is the rottenest reed on which a controversialist ever ventured to lean. Moreover, Mr. Gladstone is the last man in England who should have leaned on it. It breaks under him, and pierces him to the bone. When was it that the Turk first became the one anti-human specimen of humanity? At what precise date was it made apparent that the followers of Mahomet are unspeakable? When did it suddenly dawn upon Mr. Gladstone that it is a national

crime and disgrace for English and Ottoman soldiers to share common perils and a common triumph? Mr. Gladstone was a leading member of Lord Aberdeen's Cabinet; and the alliance with Turkey could not have been concluded without his definite and deliberate consent. The Crimean War was a war made by the Liberal Party; and more than any man still ~~living~~ Mr. Gladstone must bear the responsibility of it. If he

and they will together stand in the market-place in sackcloth and ashes, we shall at least have some measure of the sincerity of their repentance; but the nation would hardly fail to conclude that men who had been, on their own confession, so egregiously immoral then, might have become, as is the habit with penitents, egregiously squeamish now. Violent oscillations of feeling are generally regarded by students of human nature with much suspicion. They would prefer the voice of Mr. Gladstone's conscience, when acting under the sense of the gravest official responsibility, to the same sensitive organ when only the exponent of the avowedly irresponsible leader of a sentimental agitation; and they would leave us to conclude that the allies that were good enough for Mr. Gladstone twenty years ago, are quite good enough for ordinary Englishmen still.

Away, then, with the disdain it deserves, with this flimsy pretence! If we are never to have allies unless their record is clear, I know not where we shall find them. It is only a year ago that Mr. Gladstone and those Liberals who follow him, strongly urged us to find an ally in Russia. The atrocities committed in Poland in 1863 were no bar, then, to such an alliance, and it would not have been a "national disgrace" to send British soldiers to fight side by side with those who

murdered our wounded in the Crimea? Has he forgotten that more than one Russian sovereign waded to a throne through the blood of his own father? Yet it never occurred to England to refuse to hold diplomatic relations with these Imperial parricides, or even to reject their co-operation. How will Mr. Gladstone, so nice in distinctions, show me here a difference? Will he point out that though it is true they were murderers, they at least were Christians? If this be not the answer, I can conceive of no other.

But the argument, I shall be told, though neither sound nor even specious, will still be insisted on; and however insincere the leaders, and however shallow the followers of faction, it will serve to render us a divided nation? How, I shall be asked, is it possible, if a house divided against itself cannot stand, for a country divided against itself to move? I recognise the pertinence of the question, and I hasten to reply to it; and the reply shall be addressed, my Lord, like this letter, in the directest manner, to yourself.

We are a divided nation, because you are at the head of it. Some will start at the assertion, and may suppose I am about to frame an indictment against you. But you will have already more accurately gauged my meaning, and have guessed that, at length discarding all reserve, I am going to bring against a great Party the most damning but, unfortunately, the best-founded of accusations.

Like other statesmen, you have many honourable and some generous adversaries; but never in the long history of Party has an English Minister been pursued with such inflamed and envenomed hostility. Had you not been Prime Minister, I suspect we should have heard little of Bulgarian atrocities; and we should cer-

tainly never have been urged to enter into partnership with the open assailants of Turkey, and the covert assailants of England. It would never have been discovered that it is an unspeakable ignominy for British soldiers to march shoulder to shoulder with the heroic defenders of Plevna; and the country would not have been convulsed from one end to the other to save us from the disgrace of upholding our own interests. But it was necessary to embarrass, and, if possible, to upset you; and in order to reach this end, the honourable traditions of English party, all care for consistency, all regard for policy, all considerations of patriotism were thrown to the winds. You have greatly succeeded; and your success has lain across the path strewn with the failures of those who had registered a vow that you never should succeed. Fifteen years ago you generously accepted from an unknown hand the dedication of a book, in which the writer, with the pardonable enthusiasm of his age, presumed to tell you that he "revered your genius and exulted in your success." He was quickly assured, both by his compeers and his elders, that he had overshot the mark; that you were at most a novelist and a rhetorician; that your Party would take an early opportunity of ridding itself of a distasteful yoke; but that in any case it was quite certain England would never tolerate you as a Prime Minister. He remained unconvinced, and, indeed, obstinately unaffected; but such was the tone and such the language in which Liberals used to speak of you, not much more than a dozen years ago. I will not give the grosser specimens of their envious detraction; and perhaps I ought to claim indulgence for citing even the milder explosions of their spleen. But it was necessary to reproduce something of their language in the past, to

comprehend their feelings in the present. How shall we fathom the depth of their chagrin except by the extravagance of their prophecy and the abyss of its non-fulfilment? It would serve no useful purpose to dissemble or even to minimise the truth. They hate you with an undying hatred; and the depth of their hatred is commensurate with the altitude of your triumph.

As, thanks to the favour of your Sovereign and the confidence and affection of the majority of her subjects, you became Prime Minister in the teeth of these virulent prognostications, it became the chief business in life of those who had seen them thus ludicrously falsified, to take care that, having attained the highest position to which a British citizen can aspire, you should, in fulfilling its duties, not add to your renown, and should, if possible, cover yourself with discredit and disgrace. They did not pause to consider whether you were Prime Minister of England. They only saw that you were Prime Minister, and they forthwith concentrated their furious passions on the endeavour to involve you in ruin. They knew that, like every British Premier who respected himself and understood his responsibilities, you would refuse to lift a hand against the independence and integrity of Turkey. For no other reason, they clamoured that we should go hand in hand with Russia for Turkey's extermination, and they seized with a fierce glee on the massacres in Bulgaria to tie your hands and hamper your policy. They knew that, like every British Premier who is a patriot, you would be sure to subordinate all considerations arising out of the Eastern Question to the interests of England. For no other motive than that they knew such would be your course, they raised a mock-moral agitation against national selfishness, and availed themselves of the



native sentimentality of a considerable section of the English people to thwart you in carrying out the counsels of common sense.

Enough of their perfidious manœuvres in the past. But they are at this moment acting under the same malignant inspiration ; and they are determined, if they can prevent it, that the honour and interests of England shall not be saved, if they are to be saved by you. Sooner than that you shall not be discredited, the British Empire shall not be rescued from peril. The plan is all laid out ; the toils that are to enmesh you are well prepared. They see that if you forbear from addressing words of warning and menace to Russia respecting Armenia, then Kars, Trebizond, and Batoum will be severed from the Ottoman and added to the Russian Empire ; and they are straining every nerve to prevent you from speaking the words, because, when Kars, Batoum, and Trebizond are gone, they know the nation will say it was you who caused the catastrophe. They are aware that such events will be recognised in the long run to be fundamentally injurious to England. But they will be immediately injurious to you, and they are prepared to risk the detriment of their country, if they can only make certain of your degradation.

Shall you, who, during fifty long and arduous years, have foiled your foes, be defeated by them at last ? Shall it be said that you proved yourself strong enough, in the teeth of their malignity, to work your way to the highest pinnacle of power, but that you lacked the determination, in face of their opposition, to employ it for the benefit of the Empire ? Shall history record that you apparently exhausted yourself in overcoming their resistance to your own great advancement, and had no capacity left, in consequence of their unre-

laxed hostility, to assist your Sovereign and save your country? Of course they are prompt with other explanations of the silence of your tongue, and the seeming paralysis of your purpose. Having divided the nation, they allege that it is you who rule over a divided Cabinet.

Doubtless the imputation is as unfounded as it is malicious. It is perhaps in the nature of Lord Derby, by reason of the exceptional equilibrium of his mind, to give out uncertain sounds, and the uncertainty is made the most of by those who would represent him as at variance with the Prime Minister. Even as I write, I read some utterances of his, which seem to me to be very cautious, but not particularly instructive. But persons of his temperament are generally as dogged in action as they are slow to commit themselves to it; and if you decide that Russia must receive a further warning against trespassing on British interests, I doubt if there is a man in England who would second you more resolutely than the Minister for Foreign Affairs. His despatch of last May notifying the points at which Russia might possibly come into collision with England, only needs more definite application to meet all the considerations I have ventured to urge. I have made no mention of Constantinople, of the freedom of the Straits, of the Suez Canal, of Egypt; for to name them would only have been to assist those who desire to bewilder the English people by multiplying the issues before them. A promise on the part of Russia not to interfere with Egypt and the Suez Canal is, until she has conquered Armenia, about as valuable as would be an engagement on our part not to occupy Siberia; and as it is somewhat doubtful whether Russia could take Constantinople, and perfectly certain that she

would not be allowed to keep it, I regard all reference to that portion of Lord Derby's despatch of May as mere surplusage. But there is a sentence in the despatch which is of more pressing interest. "*The course of events might show,*" wrote Lord Derby to Count Schouvaloff, on May 6th of this year, "*that there were still other interests . . . which it would be their duty to protect.*" Will anybody tell me that the absorption of Armenia, and the consequent menace to Syria, to the Euphrates Valley, to Persia, and even to Egypt, was not present in Lord Derby's mind when he penned that sentence? If we were to hear to-morrow that Lord Derby had applied to Russia for a pledge concerning Armenia such as I have suggested, who would not say that his conduct was in strict conformity with the spirit of the sentence I have quoted?

But though the perfidious adversaries to whom I have alluded will sometimes allow—for that is their way of putting it—that Lord Derby is too susceptible to your influence, they continue to insinuate, for the malicious ends I have indicated, that your other colleagues operate as a useful drag upon your incorrigible propensity to rush to the assistance of the Turks. The phrase, of course, means your burning desire to secure the interests of England. But which of your colleagues, I should like to know, can justly be suspected of not sharing your desire? Lord Salisbury bears a name of traditional renown; and it would surely cut him to the heart if it could ever be said that a Cecil counselled resolute courses to Elizabeth, and his descendant urged vacillating counsels upon Victoria. Sir Stafford Northcote, though Chancellor of the Exchequer, is not like a famous predecessor in that office, more solicitous for the nation's revenue than for the nation's honour. Mr. Hardy is excellently well placed at the War Office, fr

he has more than a soldier's jealousy of our military repute; while the First Lord of the Admiralty would not have received so recent and so striking a proof of confidence from his Party had he been suspected of indifference to the glories of England. I might go through the catalogue of your colleagues; but it is unnecessary. It has never entered my mind to suppose that there is a feeble head or a faint heart among them.

But what if there were one, or two, or many? You shall yourself reply. In the debate held in the House of Commons on the 6th of July, 1855, during the Crimean War, concerning the negotiations at Vienna, you closed a memorable speech with the following words: "What chance have you of creating or maintaining enthusiasm in the people if the suspicion gets abroad that you are making of the question of peace or war merely the means of maintaining yourselves in office; that peace and war are convenient or incommodious just as they may create or influence a majority? If such an idea ever becomes prevalent in this country, I know nothing which would more deaden the spirit of the country, and which would more tend to prevent your calling with effect upon the people to make great exertions and sacrifices, than so mournful a conviction being impressed upon their minds. . . . Is this the end—that even peace and war have become mere Party considerations, and that the interests of the country are sacrificed to the menace of a majority?"

Such was your language then. If there be a glimmer of truth in the insinuation that you are being held back by any human being from doing what you believe to be your duty, remember it now. If you believe that policy demands we should have a speedy and definite guarantee that Armenia will be evacuated on the termination of the war, and any of your colleagues

shrink, through timidity or shortsightedness, from advancing the demand, then, in Heaven's name, and in strict conformity with the course you, in the above language, urged upon Lord Palmerston, part with your colleagues, or compel your colleagues to part with you. Under a Constitutional Government it cannot be said of even the greatest Minister,

"Nec sumit aut ponit secures  
Arbitrio popularis auræ."

But though no Englishman can assume power without the nation's good pleasure, he can, at any moment, lay it down at his own. Representative institutions can neither domineer nor exonerate the individual conscience; and even household suffrage leaves us all the absolute monarchs, by a divine right never to be abolished, of our personal honour, and the dictators, without appeal, of our personal duty. But, in any case, I implore you not to allow yourself to be deterred from appealing to the spirit of the English people, by the unworthy doubt that their spirit has for ever passed away. If you really believe that it does not matter to this country whether Russia conquers and retains Armenia or not, say so to your fellow-countrymen, and their minds will perhaps be at rest. Your political wisdom is great, and he would be a bold man who would set it at nought. True, we might all of us wonder what need there was to make such a fuss about Russian designs and English interests, if the only design Russia was certain to carry out, if she vanquished Turkey in the field, would not affect English interests at all. Your followers would, perhaps, be willing to believe that among the Babel of voices of the last twelvemonth there had arisen some egregious misunderstanding. But can you say anything of the kind? If you cannot, then out with what is uppermost in your

thoughts; throw yourself upon your countrymen, and appeal to them to assist you in confounding your own enemies at home and their enemies abroad. Your career is the most interesting, conspicuous, and successful in the long range of our political history; and all generous men cherish the hope, as you yourself must still more fervently cherish it, that your name will go down to posterity as one of the chief glories of her Majesty's reign. But the hope may possibly be baffled. Call no man happy till he dies; and your life is not yet spent. There are Englishmen, I blush to say it, who would not only exclaim, "Perish India!" but "Perish everything!" if they could only send you down to the grave in dishonour. It is inconceivable that you should permit them. Shall you, who disarmed a phalanx of Whig magnates, prove unable to demolish a mob of Radical professors? I adjure you, my Lord, spare us the ignominy and vexation of your final failure after witnessing half a century of continuous success. Do not let the most vigorous of careers falter to a lame and impotent conclusion, and do not leave it to the Muse of History, who will assuredly write your epitaph, instead of borrowing your own proud motto, *Forti nihil difficile*, to beg an older and more melancholy apothegm, and to say of you with a sigh of mortification, *Capax Imperii, nisi imperâsset!*

I am, my Lord, with great respect,

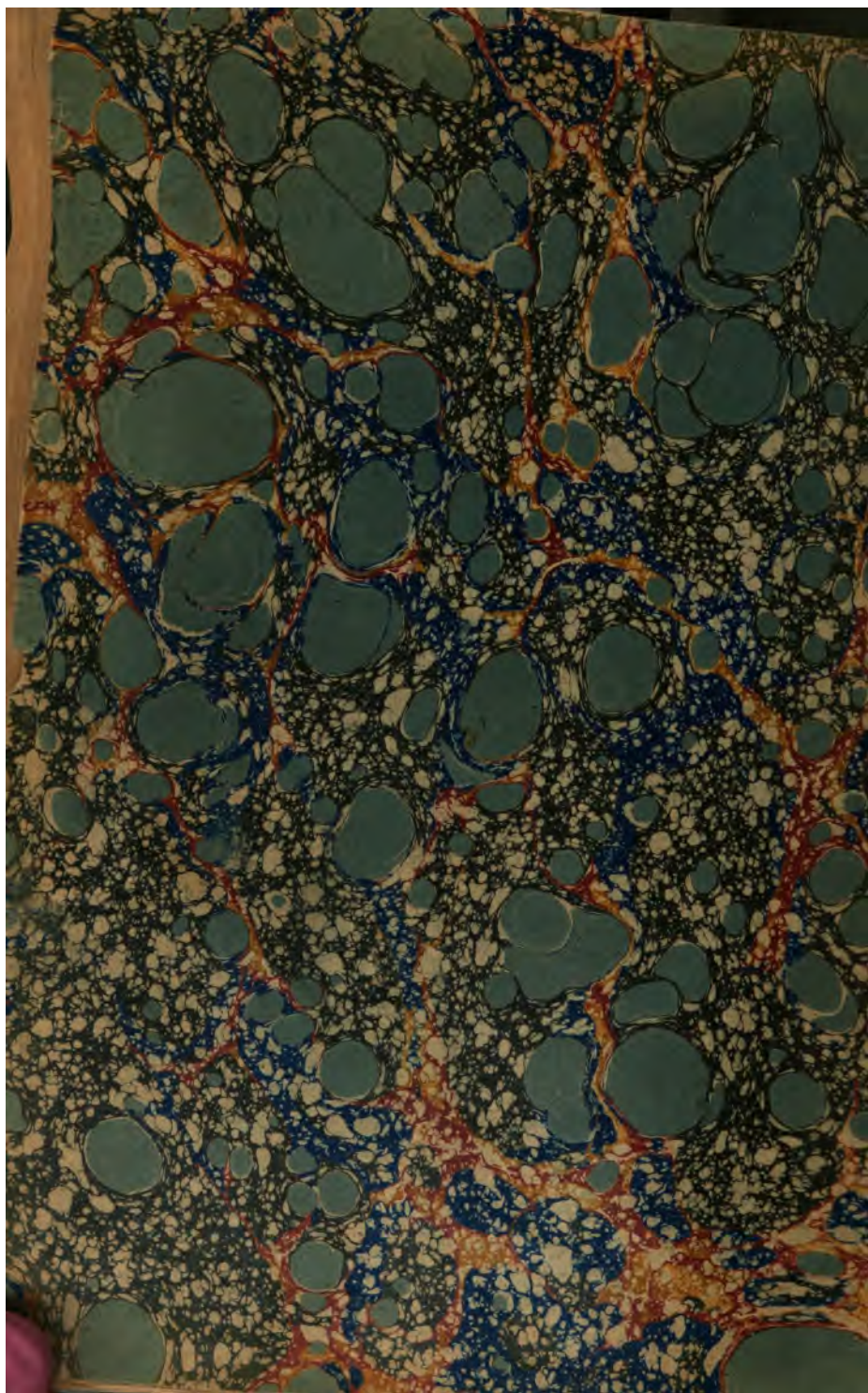
Faithfully and sincerely yours,

ALFRED AUSTIN.

SWINFORD HOUSE,

December 7.

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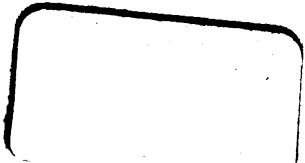
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